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## TRAGIC EFFECT IN SOPHOCLES.<sup>1</sup>

ANALYZED ACCORDING TO THE FREUDIAN METHOD.

THE effect which tragedy produces upon its auditors is too profound and complex to be explained with adequacy by a few formulæ. Its appeal is too many-sided and the aspects of our nature which it brings into play are too obscure and inarticulate. But the inquiring mind will not rest in the presence of mysteries. Every labyrinth is a challenge to exploration. Tragedy in particular is an attractive field of investigation, and we may enter upon our journey with all the better hope of some slight success, because certain modern psychologists seem to have thrown a little light upon our path.

It is characteristic of tragedy to depict a great crisis in the life of a great soul. This is well exemplified in the dramas of Sophocles. His heroes and heroines are cast in a genuinely heroic mould. They are usually members of royal houses and proud of their lineage. They are noble in nature, vigorous in will, violent in passion. They are not required to be morally perfect. Indeed Antigone startles us by her harshness to Ismene, and we can hardly forgive the aged Œdipus for the terrible curse which he lays upon his sons. Such incidents were doubtless not so offensive to the ancient Athenians as they are to us, for their moral ideals involved far less emphasis on pity and charity than

<sup>1</sup> One of the Bowdoin Prizes for essays by graduate students of Harvard University was awarded to this essay in May 1911.

ours. Yet the popularity of Euripides, who was a contemporary of Sophocles's later years, shows that the public was also susceptible to works of a decidedly more humanitarian temper. Other faults, which were certainly reprehensible from the Greek standpoint, were defiance of the authority of the state, scepticism with regard to soothsayers and oracles, and impiety toward the gods. But Sophocles's protagonists, whatever their faults, are never deficient in that energy of will and passion which lifts them above the common level of mankind and gives them a certain grandeur and sublimity.

Characters such as these are brought face to face with some great crisis which often results in the ruin of the protagonist. Suicide, burial alive, blinding followed by exile—these are the events in which some of the dramas culminate. But in the *Electra* and the *Philoctetes* the protagonist is saved, not ruined. Most theories of tragedy are concerned chiefly with the former type and perhaps unduly neglect the latter.

The relation of the hero to his doom has been made the subject of profound reflection by many philosophers and critics. It seems to offer inexhaustible material for psychological and metaphysical analysis and for ethical and religious interpretation. I cannot enter into the opinions of later philosophers, but it is desirable to give a brief résumé of the conceptions which the Greeks themselves seem to have embodied in their tragedies.

The Greek tragedies were based on ancient legends. At the time when these legends were taking shape two notions were prominent in the popular consciousness, of which one is the doctrine of the envy of the gods. Disasters which overtake the powerful and prosperous make a vivid impression on the mind. The Greeks felt that the gods must begrudge to man a power and happiness that suggested a comparison with their own. It seemed natural

that the gods should remind man of his mortality and feebleness by bringing disaster upon him. The other notion was the conception of a curse which rested upon a whole family and descended from father to son, begetting fresh crimes and bloodshed in each generation. These notions were embodied in the legends.

As moral ideals were gradually raised the legends were modified so as to give expression to the new ideals. We no longer find prosperity directly incurring the divine displeasure, but prosperity breeding insolence or excess and that in turn incurring disaster. The notion of an ancestral curse is not discarded, but its arbitrariness is mitigated by showing how the evil deeds of one generation provoke the next generation to crime. It is in approximately this form that we find the legends first embodied in the drama. But the art of the dramatists carried the development still further, adding new motives or developing those already latent in the legends. Character is so depicted that the transgression seems to flow naturally from it, and the action so handled that the disaster seems to flow naturally from the transgression. Yet the transgression that incurs disaster must not be such as to alienate the sympathy of the audience. It must be great in order to account for the ruin that follows, and small in order to retain the sympathy of the spectators. This paradox is well solved by the transgression which has a double aspect. It may be slight from the standpoint of the doer, being committed without intent or in ignorance, while it is serious from the standpoint of the observer. Such is the deed of Œdipus, who slays his father in a quarrel on the highway, not knowing who he is. This was subjectively a justifiable retribution for injury, but objectively it was parricide. The development of this solution of the original paradox culminates in the far more profound paradox of the conflict of rights. Thus Antigone stands for a sacred duty to the dead in opposition to Creon

who stands for the inviolable authority of the state. Such a conflict is most poignant when it occurs not between two persons but within the heart of a single person, as when Neoptolemus is drawn in one direction by his loyalty to the cause of the Greeks, and in another by his love of honesty and his pity for Philoctetes.

Such then are the typical materials of tragedy. Let us now see how they are employed by Sophocles.

In the "Œdipus Tyrannus" we find a hero keenly conscious of his sagacity, his strength of will, and his authority. He is intensely a king, endowed with the capacity to rule and glorying in the exercise of his power. He has won his kingdom by his own skill in answering the riddle of the Sphinx and holds it by his ability as a ruler. By the course of the drama the terrible secret of his birth, his parricide, and his incestuous marriage is gradually brought to light. Point by point the proofs accumulate and wring from him an unwilling assent. When at last all is clear, the violence of his passion is such as only a mighty nature can feel. He blinds himself that he may never again see the sights that would recall his glory and his shame, and he is never more sublime than in his desolation.

His own guilt in all this is slight. When the oracle announced that he was to slay his father and marry his mother, it was no sin for him to shun the city of his supposed parents. At the crossroads he was perhaps too easily provoked to vengeance, but he had no intention of parricide. It was surely no sin to free Thebes from the oppression of the Sphinx, to accept the kingdom, and to marry the widowed queen. It was natural that a man who had thus attained prosperity in spite of oracles should pay small respect to them. Such was his career subjectively viewed, but objectively his vengeance at the crossroads was parricide, and his marriage was incest; his wretched fate is the appropriate recompense for those deeds.

In the "Œdipus Coloneus" we find a softer atmosphere. Œdipus has assumed something of the saint, but he is still predominantly the hero. He is still suffering the consequences of the deeds depicted in the former drama. He is a wanderer dependent on scanty alms, but "his afflictions and the weight of years teach him contentment." The gods, moved by his original good intent and his long penance, are about to release him from misery. He is to depart from life, not by any ordinary death, but by a mysterious translation to the other world. He is thus set apart from other mortals as a special object of divine solicitude and invested with a sort of sanctity. The crisis which he meets is the attempt of his sons and Creon to use him for their purposes. The vigor of his resistance and the vindictiveness of the curse which he lays upon his sons reveal a spirit untamed by adversity and unsoftened by the prospect of release. His departure from life is a solemn triumph in his release from suffering, in the blessing his presence is to bring to Athens, in the doom that awaits his persecutors, and in the special favor shown to him by the gods.

Ajax is a supreme embodiment of soldierly qualities as Œdipus is of kingly qualities. His valor leads him to such a pitch of self-confidence that he scorns the aid of the gods. When the Atridæ ignore his pre-eminence in valor by awarding the arms of Achilles to another his unquenchable fury is aroused. He sets out to avenge himself on the Atridae and Ulysses, but a divine power turns his attempted vengeance into mockery. When he awakes to his situation life has no more value to him. He recognizes that the gods are too strong for man to resist, but he will not call them just. He recognizes that the Atridæ must be obeyed, but he summons the Furies to pursue them without respite. He refuses to prolong his life without honor, tenderly makes such provision as he can for the future of his little son, and then betaking himself to a lonely spot

on the seashore he falls upon his sword. His death is no triumph for his enemies, but a release which he himself secures. The Atridæ seek to deprive his body of honorable burial, but the memory of his valor and magnanimity lives so vividly in the heart of his former foe, Ulysses, that that disaster is averted. And with this posthumous victory the drama ends.

In the "Trachiniæ," Deianira is depicted as the devoted wife of Heracles, eager to maintain first place in his affections, and resenting the presence in the same house of his new favorite Iole. She resorts to a charm which she had been assured in ambiguous words would bring it to pass that Heracles "should love no other woman more than her." This charm proves to be a fatal poison, and when she hears the news of its effect she departs without a word and takes her life. Heracles is brought in on a litter to wail out his physical agony before the audience and to curse Deianira. The story of her death convinces him of her innocent intent. He draws a vivid contrast between his former labors and his ignominious end and finally bids his retainers to take him to a mountain top and let him end his misery in fire.

The "Philoctetes" is a complex tragedy, involving three contrasted characters, Philoctetes, Neoptolemus, and Ulysses. The passionate Philoctetes, embittered by years of anguish, is set over against the cold and crafty Ulysses. Between them stands the noble-hearted youth Neoptolemus, to be played upon by both. Ulysses requires all his eloquence to persuade Neoptolemus to get control of Philoctetes by trickery. Neoptolemus reluctantly consents and has carried the design almost to completion when his pity is so aroused by a fit of pain which seizes Philoctetes that he reveals to him Ulysses's purpose to take him to Troy. In spite of his wretched plight Philoctetes cannot be persuaded to consent, but he in turn persuades Neoptolemus

to take him home, in defiance of Ulysses and the other generals. They are about to depart when the deified Heracles intervenes and reconciles Philoctetes to the necessity of going to Troy. The purpose of Ulysses is achieved, but not through his own skill; Neoptolemus has been true to his better self, and Philoctetes's passion for revenge is overruled by the influence of the divinity.

At the opening of the tragedy which bears her name, Electra is living in wretchedness, brooding over the death of her father and yearning for the return of Orestes to avenge it. She defies the authority of her father's murderer and suffers for that defiance. She receives news that she is soon to be buried alive, and then the news that Orestes is dead. She resolves to meet this crisis by slaying Ægisthus, but her project is interrupted by the arrival and recognition of Orestes. Her joy at his return is unbounded, but action is required. Without a trace of compunction she furthers his purpose to kill Clytemnestra, receives the returning Ægisthus with fine irony, and delivers him up to be slain. The drama ends in her complete triumph. Here, as in the "Philoctetes," we see that genuine tragic effect may be produced without involving the ruin of the protagonist. It is enough that a great soul meets a great crisis, whatever the outcome may be.

The "Antigone" is a double tragedy, for although Antigone herself is the center of interest, the transgression and downfall of Creon are also portrayed. Creon has decreed that the body of Polynices shall remain unburied. In defiance of this decree Antigone pays funeral rites to her beloved brother, proclaiming that she obeys a divine law far more worthy of reverence than the command of Creon. He in turn declares that no favor must be shown to the enemy of the state. In spite of the pleading of his son Hæmon, he orders that Antigone be left to perish in a living tomb. Tiresias proclaims the divine displeasure at the



exposure of Polynices. Creon's fears are aroused. He orders the burial of Polynices and the release of Antigone, but it is too late. Antigone has already hanged herself; her lover Hæmon kills himself in her father's sight, and Creon's wife, on hearing of the disaster, takes her own life. Creon confesses and laments his guilt and wanders forth to a life of wretchedness. A conflict of divine and human law is thus depicted. Antigone, the champion of the divine law, goes to a serene and glorious martyrdom, but her opponent Creon is left a pitiable survivor.

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We have now analyzed tragedy into its chief constituents and shown how they are employed in the dramas of Sophocles. But this analysis has done little or nothing to show why we care for tragedy. The dominant elements in tragedy are sin and disaster. Why do we care to see them depicted? In actual life we try to have as little of them as possible. If circumstances force us to witness an actual crime or an actual death we do not wish to repeat the experience; but we have our favorite tragedies which we read and reread, and which we see on the stage as often as opportunity offers. It seems a strange perversion that makes us seek in art what we shun in life.

It is of course true that the mimic woes of tragedy do not produce upon us the same effect as the corresponding actuality would produce. The tragic action takes place in a world of its own, cut off from the world of our practical activity. We know that the actors are not really in agony. We do not rush upon the stage to dry their tears or bind up their wounds. Our attitude is contemplative, not active. Since action is inhibited one might suppose that the sympathies which are the springs of action were also inhibited, but if that were the case tragedy would be a mere spectacle and arouse only such interest as we feel in the gyrations of a mechanical toy. That is not our experience.

The stirring of our sympathies seems to be essential to tragic effect, and we value most the tragedy that stirs them most profoundly.

We have already seen that tragedy may be a vehicle for the expression of profound moral and philosophical convictions and some theorist may seek to explain the appeal of tragedy on this basis. We tolerate the depiction of crime and disaster, he would say, because of the profound truths which are conveyed. But this again seems to be the reverse of our experience. The appeal seems to lie in the events and the characters, not in the lesson; we are lured by the story to listen to the theory, not *vice versa*.

The reason for our love of tragedy evidently does not lie upon the surface of the tragedy itself, nor upon the surface of our consciousness. We must look deeper. There may be forces at work in us of which we ordinarily have no clear consciousness. I believe that there are such forces at work, and that a consideration of them will throw light on our problem. Let us therefore consider at some length a certain theory as to the structure of our mental life. The most recent and most adequate form of this theory is that of Professor Freud of Vienna, whose writings first suggested the reflections upon which this essay is based; but it will be convenient to begin with the earlier and simpler forms of the theory.

Plato in the ninth book of the "Republic" constructs a composite image of the soul.<sup>2</sup> The first component is "a multitudinous, many-headed monster having a ring of heads of all manner of beasts, tame and wild, which he is able to generate and metamorphose at will." The second component is a lion, and the third a man. The fusion of these three constitutes the human soul. To attain righteousness a man must "ever so speak and act as to give the man within him in some way or other the most complete

<sup>2</sup> Steph., 588 C, 589 A B (Jowett's translation).

mastery over the entire human creature. He should watch over the many-headed monster like a good husbandman, fostering and cultivating the gentle qualities and preventing the wild ones from growing: he should be making the lion heart his ally, and in common care of them should be uniting the several parts with one another and with himself." In other passages and in varied metaphors Plato repeats his analysis of the soul into a rational element, a passionate element, and a merely animal element, which strive against one another, but ought to be brought into harmony.

Plato is not alone in noting the presence of conflicting tendencies in our consciousness and conduct. Such conflicts are a salient aspect of human experience and an ever-recurring topic in the writings of moral and religious teachers. Christian thought has dwelt upon the conflict of the flesh and the spirit. Popular psychology tells of head and heart and physical appetites. All of these divisions have a certain value and pertinency, but they do not represent any thoroughgoing analysis. They do not represent all the cleavages that may be found, but only those which have the greatest interest to the moralist.

It is indeed convenient to distinguish one's higher self from one's lower nature, or one's intellectual self from one's emotional self. But we may go further. We may distinguish a professional self from the self that is revealed in contact with one's family, and that again from the self which is preoccupied with some amusement or some hobby. Each of these selves has its appropriate series of ideas, its appropriate group of emotions, its appropriate type of behavior. Carrying this analysis still further we find smaller and smaller units, each consisting of a group of ideas with a characteristic emotional tone and a tendency to produce a particular sort of conduct.

We have now reached Professor Freud's form of the

theory. In his terminology the units above defined are called psychic complexes. Every complex is organized about some core, some central idea or tendency. The idea of Boston, for instance, is the core of a complex including the shops and theaters that one has visited there, the friends who live there, one's admiration or dislike of the city, a tendency to visit it as frequently or as seldom as possible, and many other ideas, and feelings and desires. The instinct to eat is the core of another complex, including the various kinds of food, the places where it may be obtained, the need of money to buy it, and so on. A man's profession is the core of a large and important complex, with a great variety of subcomplexes, involving his mass of technical information, his ambition for the future, and his methods of dealing with his associates and his rivals.

The whole content of a man's mind may thus be divided up into complexes, as a nation is divided up into smaller social groups. The various complexes are analogous to the families, clubs, corporations, professions, and political parties. It may be noted in passing that a given idea may belong to numerous complexes. Dinners for instance not only satisfy hunger, but are an occasion for social intercourse and sometimes for political speeches. The notion of dinner may therefore be a member of several distinct complexes, just as a single person may be the member of a family and also of a church and of a university.

It is obvious that these complexes are not all present in consciousness and expressed in conduct at once. A man devotes a part of the day to his profession, a part to eating, a part to social intercourse, or exercise, or amusement. The ideas, emotions, and modes of behavior which are present in one of these periods differ from those present in the rest. In other words, during each period he is controlled by a single complex, with its subordinate and allied complexes. If we analyzed the course of his experience more minutely

we should find the expressions of a series of complexes concerned with particular problems of his profession, particular friends, particular sources of amusement, and the like.

But the relations among the complexes are not confined to amicable succession in control. There are hostilities among them as there are hostilities among social groups in a nation. Amusement interferes with business, business with amusement, and charity may interfere with both. Morality seeks to organize and unify all these complexes in the interest of the social order and of the individual's highest welfare. In order to do this certain complexes must be enriched and perpetuated and given dominance over conduct; many must be radically modified in order to fit in; and some must be deprived of influence on conduct and banished from consciousness as far as possible.

It is these conflicts which lead to the Platonic simile of the man, the lion, and the beast, and to the Christian conception of a war between the flesh and the spirit. Such conceptions throw the bewildering variety of complexes into a few broad divisions made on moral grounds. But other cleavages and other conflicts are just as real, and the old divisions are therefore inadequate from a scientific standpoint. There are esthetic and prudential conflicts as well as moral conflicts. There is a repression of tendencies to bad taste and foolishness and unconventionality as well as a repression of tendencies to vice. Our waking life as a whole is dominated by a great group of complexes which guide our thoughts and conduct along the lines of conventional morality and taste and prudence. This group of complexes may be said to constitute the upper stratum of the mind; the less favored complexes, the lower stratum.

The process by which one complex prevents another from expressing itself in conduct and even banishes it from consciousness is called suppression. But suppressed complexes are not annihilated. They may continue to invade

consciousness from time to time, or they may influence the course of events in consciousness without actually coming to the surface. The dictates of prudence and kindliness lead us to suppress reference to the faults and misfortunes of those with whom we converse, but anger weakens the force of this censorship, and the angry man says things which he could not bring himself to say in a moment of calmness. Other strong passions as well as anger may weaken the control of the upper stratum; alcohol and other drugs, fatigue, weakness, and pain have a similar effect.

But suppressed complexes may also give evidence of their presence without actually coming into consciousness. Like moles burrowing in the ground, they may disturb the surface without appearing on it. It is on this principle that Professor Freud accounts for a variety of phenomena, including dreams, hysteria, and wit.

This fact that complexes once or repeatedly suppressed are likely to affect consciousness again may be most conveniently expressed by saying that they continue to exist in the subconscious, but any reference to the subconscious is likely to arouse distrust and provoke controversy. Here, however, no specific theory of the subconscious is presupposed. The suppressed complexes may be preserved merely in the form of traces in the nervous system, which may become from time to time the physiological basis of the disturbances above mentioned; or they may be preserved as actual conscious states not accessible to introspection, but constituting a series of processes parallel to those which we find by introspection; or their subconscious survival may be merely a convenient term to denote the virtual existence of something whose only actual existence lies in its occasional effects on introspective consciousness. One of these theories will serve quite as well as another for the present purpose.

The full force of the theory of suppressed complexes

can be seen only in its applications, and of these I can give but a few examples. I shall select examples that seem most likely to have a bearing on the theory of tragic effect. The first of the series of cases that originally led to the formulation of the theory was as follows. A girl was suffering from hysteria. At one time during her illness she became unable to drink. In spite of her thirst she could not bring herself to touch a glass of water. While under hypnosis she happened to relate that a few weeks before this she had seen the governess's dog drink from a glass of water. She had been intensely disgusted at the sight, but had repressed all signs of the emotion out of respect to conventionality. As she narrated the incident she gave energetic expression to her restrained anger. She soon called for a glass of water and drank without trouble. The symptom vanished permanently.

The mechanism of the case seems to be as follows. An incident occurred which combined the feelings of disgust and repugnance with the idea of drinking water. The complex thus formed was firmly repressed by the upper stratum. Its energy was thus deprived of its natural outlet in angry words and gesture, but it tended to escape in some other channel. The line of least resistance lay in making the process of drinking distasteful to the person. The reason for this distaste was prevented from rising into consciousness by the censorship of the complexes of the upper stratum. When the vigilance of the upper stratum was relaxed by hypnosis, the complex found a natural outlet for its energies, and no longer needed to produce an abnormal symptom. Freud has treated many hysteric symptoms on the presupposition that they have a similar origin and may be relieved in a similar way. His method of treatment is to cause the patient to explore his memories. He especially insists that all ideas that tend to arise shall be allowed to run a free course; none must be rejected as unpleasant or

foolish or improper; criticism must be relaxed. In short, the censorship of the upper stratum must be suspended as far as possible, for in that way the suppressed complexes have the best chance to find relief.

Freud calls this treatment the cathartic treatment, thus recalling to us the most famous of all dicta on the function of tragedy, namely Aristotle's statement that tragedy through pity and terror effects a catharsis of these emotions. It is possible that we have here something more than a superficial analogy, but before we consider this possibility let us take up one further application of Freud's theory.

Dreams for the most part seem to have no intelligible connection with the rest of life. Some of them, however, will be found to depict situations which are demanded by suppressed wishes. Erotic dreams are a typical instance of this. This suggests that other dreams may be disguised expressions of suppressed wishes just as the hysterical symptom is a disguised manifestation of suppressed emotion. There is excellent evidence that this is the case. Let a person consider one of his own dreams that does not on the face of it express a wish. Let him analyze it into its components, that is, let him consider each of the persons and incidents depicted one by one. Let him fix his attention on one of these, and allow the associated ideas to flow into consciousness with perfect freedom, suspending as well as he can the critical censorship of the upper stratum. Let him do the same for each of the other components. In the course of this process he will be almost sure to come upon the memory of some wish or tendency that he has suppressed. That idea will come with a certain air of finality, and the investigator will have an instinctive feeling that his search has found its goal.

It seems natural to suppose that the suppressed wishes thus recalled are the sources of the dream. The relaxa-



tion of the censorship of the upper stratum during sleep gives the suppressed complexes an opportunity to disport themselves. But they do not find the censorship entirely suspended. They therefore remain suppressed until they happen to assume the form of some imagery which the censorship will allow to pass. The wishes may therefore appear only in a disguised form, and the more firmly they are suppressed in the waking life, the more complete the disguise which they assume in the dream, because of the resistance they must overcome. The process by which this disguise was effected is retraced step by step in reverse order by the series of associated ideas above noted.

This process may be illustrated in the case of a man who dreamed of an acquaintance who was teaching in the same university with him. The dream-image had the features of an uncle of the dreamer's, though it purported to represent the acquaintance. It was accompanied by the consciousness of a strong affection for this composite person. On tracing out the associated ideas the dreamer recalled that this uncle was rather a blockhead, had sometimes got into trouble with the law, and had never made a success of his life; he also recalled that his acquaintance was his rival for appointment to a certain professorship, but was not extremely brilliant, and that another rival had been involved in a lawsuit in early life. The dream may therefore be regarded as the expression of a wish that his rivals should fail in their candidacy for the professorship. The dream emphasized the points which might militate against his rivals' success and hinted that they would be decisive, but it did this indirectly by identifying the rivals with another person who had analogous shortcomings, and whose shortcomings moreover had proved disastrous. But why was the feeling of affection present in a dream whose motive was hostility? This reversal would seem to be due to the repressing influence of the upper stratum, which

thus as it were avenges itself on the intruding complex. Freud holds that the emotional tone of a dream is very frequently due to the upper stratum, not to the lower.

The difficulty of recognizing dreams as the fulfilment of wishes is now readily explained. It is suppressed wishes that they fulfil. When the dreamer awakes and the upper stratum resumes control, he may sincerely declare that he has no such wish. It is not his dominant self which harbors it, but the submerged self of which he is not even conscious. Moreover the wished-for situation is often disguised beyond recognition, precisely in order to elude the censorship of the upper stratum. The reversal of the emotional tone often makes the situation seem one that is to be feared and shunned rather than wished. Furthermore the wishes expressed are often survivals of early childhood and quite foreign to adult habits. Freud attributes the dreams of falling through the air, or floating horizontally in it, to childhood experiences of being tossed up and caught again, or rapidly carried along—experiences of which children are fond.

We have now discussed the conflicts between complexes. We have shown how the vanquished complexes, although suppressed, still find an outlet for their energies in hysteria and in dreams. Suppressed complexes are also concerned in certain slips of memory, in the production of wit and in its enjoyment, but we shall not attempt to analyze these processes.

There is, however, another type of relation between complexes which deserves our attention. There is not merely conflict between complexes but there is also co-operation, reinforcement, and even coalescence. Professional zeal is reinforced by the desire for financial return. The desire for financial return is itself the resultant of a variety of complexes including desires for food and shelter, for family life, for social position, and the like. A special

and very important case of this is the reinforcement of a complex belonging to the upper stratum by a suppressed complex. When this occurs a double result follows. The suppressed complex has found an outlet for its energies without having to appear in a form offensive to the upper stratum; it need no longer give rise to hysterical symptoms or to dreams; its contribution of energy to the reinforced complex serves as a substitute for these. On the other hand the reinforced complex has more energy at its command, and therefore expresses itself with more vigor and completeness. Such a process may be called the sublimation of the suppressed complex. In a broader sense the term sublimation may be applied to any case in which a complex, whether suppressed or not, is made tributary to a complex of higher esthetic or moral value. Perhaps the most striking instance of sublimation is that of romantic love, in which physical passion is diverted from immediate gratification, and finds vent in emotions of tenderness and adoration, in the production of songs and sonnets, and in the intensification of professional or warlike ambitions.

I have not attempted to establish the truth of Freud's theories, but only to show what they are. I have omitted many aspects of them which are important for the explanation of dreams or hysteria, but which do not seem to be applicable to tragedy. If therefore the account of dreams and hysteria seems inadequate, that should not discredit the theory of complexes. The points of the theory which I have sought to make clear are that the mind contains a variety of psychic complexes, that some of these come to be suppressed, that the complexes dominant in the waking life form a fairly well-defined group which may be called the upper stratum, that suppressed complexes force their way to the surface in disguised forms, and that complexes may be sublimated.

How then is this theory to be applied to the psychology of tragedy? Professor Freud himself has given us some clues. As I have already noted, his term "cathartic treatment" suggests Aristotle's definition of the function of tragedy. It raises the query: "May the tragic catharsis also be the release or sublimation of the suppressed complexes?" Freud carries us a step further by an incidental reference in his book on dreams.<sup>3</sup> He is speaking of those premonitions of erotic passion which begin very early in childhood, but whose presence usually escapes notice. He asserts that the boy's first infatuation is for his mother, and his first jealousy for his father. The influence of such tendencies survives in the special devotion which a son usually shows to his mother, and the strained relations which frequently develop between him and his father. Freud then refers to the "Œdipus Tyrannus" which hinges on precisely this situation. Œdipus has unwittingly yet actually become the murderer of his father and the husband of his mother.

Freud attributes the peculiar poignancy of the horror which we feel at the situation of Œdipus to the fact that in our early and forgotten infancy we had to suppress such tendencies as we here see realized; the upper stratum recognizes an ancient enemy and reacts against it with peculiar force. He does not explicitly offer a theory of tragedy in general. He claims to explain why we are horrified, but does not explain why we are fascinated.

Let us now go a step beyond Freud, but in the direction which his work suggests, and formulate a general theory. *Tragedy attracts us because it depicts situations which our suppressed complexes demand.* The protagonist does what our suppressed complexes would have us do; his action therefore gratifies those complexes. Where the plot of the tragedy centers around transgression and disaster, it is

<sup>3</sup> S. Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, 3d ed., Leipsic, 1911, 189 ff.

not the disaster to the protagonist which attracts us, but his transgression, and the way in which he bears the disaster. The primary appeal is therefore not to the upper stratum but to the lower. The upper stratum, however, is not idle; it must be placated, or it will force us to turn away from the tragedy in disgust, and thus leave the suppressed complexes unsatisfied. From this psychological standpoint the primary aspect of tragedy is the appeal to suppressed complexes, and its secondary aspect the methods of placating the upper stratum.

The theory above stated is perfectly general in form, but I shall not here attempt to apply it to any other works than those of Sophocles. Let us consider what are the suppressed complexes to which the Sophoclean tragedies appeal, and what devices are employed to placate the upper stratum.

A drama that involves no contest hardly deserves the name of drama, and tragedy especially centers about some struggle in which the protagonist engages. This appeals to an instinct which is very powerful, yet which has to be repressed in civilized communities, namely pugnacity. When a child's wishes are thwarted he becomes angry and fights to the best of his ability. But all sorts of social forces work upon him to suppress such tendencies. He learns to control or at least to conceal his resentments and animosities. When he has reached maturity these tendencies have little opportunity for free play. The upper stratum exercises a rigid censorship on all expressions of anger and hostility, for both prudence and kindness require self-control.

Tragedy gratifies our pugnacity by showing the fighting spirit in vigorous operation. An instance of this is *Œdipus's* graphic narrative of the quarrel at the cross-roads, where he, single-handed, slew Laius and his four retainers. The account culminates in the grim phrase

κτείνω δὲ τοὺς ξύμπαντας,

which is thrilling in its effect. It is not merely such bits as this, however, that appeal to our pugnacity, for in many cases the attitude of the protagonist in the whole action is one of defiance. Philoctetes's hatred of the Atridæ is the keynote of the drama that bears his name. One of its most effective passages is that in which Philoctetes, having just recovered from a paroxysm of physical anguish, reasserts his unalterable resolution to remain in misery rather than bow to the will of his enemies. The effect is intensified when the protagonist's hate is directed against some member of his own family. We find hate where we might expect love, and judge its power by the strength of the ties it has broken. This effect is produced by Electra's desire for vengeance upon her mother, and by the curse which the aged Œdipus invokes upon his sons. Hostility to the state and to the gods is especially effective, because the protagonist defies a power so much greater than his own. Our admiration of Antigone is due in part to her magnificent defiance of Creon, and Ajax stirs us by his defiance of the gods.

Closely allied with pugnacity is the tendency to pride, display, and self-assertion. This tendency also shows itself in children, but is repressed. The community demands modesty, and humiliates those who will not learn it. A strong appeal to this tendency is made by the magnificent self-confidence of such heroes as Ajax and Œdipus. Most of Sophocles's protagonists belong to royal houses and are proud of the fact. This pride makes their downfall all the more pitiable, but it also nerves them to endurance, as when the aged Œdipus mentions his own dignity as one of the sources of his resignation.

Another tendency which is universally present and universally subject to some degree of repression is erotic passion. Freud's treatment of this factor in the "Œdipus

Tyrannus" has already been noted. Let me add that I suppose that this factor not only makes the situation horrible to the upper stratum, as Freud remarks, but also makes it attractive to the lower stratum. We admire the tragedy because the fascination which we dimly feel outweighs the horror of which we are clearly conscious.

Freud might well have extended his investigations to the "Electra," which seems to me to be the companion-piece to the "Œdipus." What is true of the boy's relation to his parents is true of the girl's *mutatis mutandis*. The father is the first recipient of her devotion, and the mother her first rival; and in a lesser degree a sister is also a rival. Electra's father has been murdered by her mother and her mother's paramour. She herself is forbidden to marry, lest she raise up children hostile to the murderers, and her natural impulses are thus turned inward to embitter her brooding passion for revenge. What wonder that she hates Clytemnestra, who has not only cut off the object of her devotion, but has shown herself unworthy ever to have been Agamemnon's mate! What wonder that she regards the sacrifice of her sister Iphigenia as a flimsy excuse for such a crime, and that she scorns the weakness of her other sister Chrysothemis! What wonder that she hates Ægisthus who usurps her father's power! What wonder that she rails at the adulterous union of the murderers! Such are the motives which play far beneath the surface, but which contribute much to the power of the drama.

In the "Ajax" and the "Antigone" the erotic motive is not of great importance, for the devotion of Tecmessa to Ajax and of Hæmon to Antigone are only incidental to the chief action. But in the "Trachiniæ" it is the dominant force. It is passion that leads Heracles to capture Iole and send her to Trachis. It is the desire to be first in Heracles's affections which moves Deianira to send the fatal gift.

This tragedy is not so effective as the other Sophoclean tragedies that have survived. The reason is that the underlying motives do not find sufficiently vigorous expression. We know Heracles's passion for Iole only by cold hearsay. Deianira is not moved to any grand revenge or grand renunciation, but meets the crisis with a foolish trick.

Sophocles's dramas have still another source of power, which is found in the laments. The psychology of their effect is a topic on which I cannot speak with confidence, but the situation seems to be this. In actual life the effect of disaster is to depress our vitality and also to evoke an emotional reaction, involving tears, moans, and violent gestures. This emotional expression seems to constitute a sort of revulsion against the situation which occasions the depression. We avoid such situations because of the depression which they occasion, not because of the revulsion—we do not primarily revolt against the revulsion, which would be absurd. There is no way of inhibiting the depression, but the revulsion is suppressed in many cases by pride, by a desire not to alarm others, and by other motives. Now when laments are presented on the stage our vitality is not depressed, for the disaster has not fallen upon us, but our suppressed tendencies to emotional revulsions are gratified, for we see grief expressed with eloquence and abandon. I need only mention the passage which follows the blinding of *Œdipus* to show how effective a lament may be. Laments are prominent in all the seven tragedies. They are especially powerful where the protagonist summons his pride and his fighting spirit to his aid as do *Ajax* and *Œdipus*.

Other suppressed complexes to which tragedy appeals could be mentioned, but pugnacity, pride, erotic passion, and the tendency to lamentation seem to be the most important. These are emphasized in countless ways by the skill of the tragic poet.



One of the most important devices of emphasis is contrast. The most tragic of contrasts is that between the passionate hero and the force which threatens or compasses his ruin. When *Œdipus* derides the oracles, or *Ajax* speaks defiantly of the gods, we feel their vitality all the more intensely because we are at the same time reminded of the doom which awaits them. The actual occurrence of the disaster produces a double emphasis. It creates a contrast between the strength of the hero's character and the wretchedness of his plight, and it also tests the hero's character by evoking its whole strength. One reason why the actual occurrence of the disaster in tragedy is preferable to its being threatened and averted is that only so can all the resources of the hero's character be brought into play.

Emphasis on the hero's passion is also secured by the rhetorical art with which the speeches and dialogue are composed. The protagonist is not inarticulate but eloquent. Moreover his emotions find not only a direct expression in his own words and deeds, but an indirect expression through the responsive emotions of the chorus. We see not only the stern resolution of *Ajax* but the perplexed forebodings and again the false hopes of his sailors; not only the misery of *Œdipus* but the sympathetic grief of the Thebans.

All these devices for emphasizing the hero's passion commend the drama to the suppressed complexes; but they would make it only the more obnoxious to the upper stratum if no concessions were made to the demands of morality, conventionality, and beauty. Let us therefore turn to those extenuating circumstances and elevating factors in tragedy which make it acceptable to the upper stratum of the mind.

A great variety of factors tend to palliate the evil involved in the transgression which the protagonist in most tragedies commits. Chief among these are the motives

which at least partially justify his act. Ajax, Electra, and Philoctetes have received injuries which tend to justify the violence of their hatred. The presence of Iole justifies Deianira in an attempt to guarantee her own position, though not in the folly of her method. Antigone is moved by love for her brother and by a reverence for the divine laws, while Creon is moved by what he regards as the interests of the state.

Sometimes the situation presents a dilemma such that whichever course the hero may choose will involve disloyalty. Neoptolemus has to choose between loyalty to the Greek leaders and the demands of honesty and pity; Antigone has to choose between respect for human law and respect for divine law. Since in such cases the protagonist cannot avoid evil, he is the more readily forgiven. Thus the upper stratum is placated, and our suppressed pugnacity delights in defiance displayed in a good cause nearly as much as if the cause were evil.

There is a peculiar economy of motive in a tragedy such as the "Antigone," where the transgression of each of the chief characters tends to justify the transgression of the other. The evil is decreased by duplication and our sympathy intensified by division.

Transgression is often condoned because it seems to be the incidental result of an admirable quality. Ajax's impious scorn of divine aid and his excessive resentment of an injury are incidental to that impetuous valor which made him the "bulwark of the Achæans." Œdipus's hasty action at the cross-roads, and his contempt for the seemingly discredited oracle, are due to the qualities of energy, sagacity, and self-reliance that won him a kingdom and enabled him to rule it well.

When the protagonist transgresses unwittingly his act loses none of its horror but becomes pitiable instead of

reprehensible. The parricide and incest of Œdipus, and Deianira's fatal gift to Heracles, are cases of this sort.

In the "Œdipus Tyrannus" the whole course of Œdipus's life is dominated by the mysterious and implacable fate which step by step fulfils the oracle spoken at his birth. He seems to be acting of his own free will and avoiding the disasters of which he is warned. But this semblance of freedom is actual bondage, and this semblance of escape is actual ruin. His transgression indeed flows from his character, but since character and occasion are fatally predetermined the responsibility seems to be lifted from his shoulders.

The Greek tragedies were based on familiar legends, and the audience knew in advance the general course of events. The contemplation of the action was mingled with foreknowledge of the impending disaster. The transgression therefore seemed less heinous because it was known that it would bring pitiable ruin instead of undeserved prosperity.

The transgression is more readily condoned when it is followed by repentance as well as disaster. Creon fully admits his guilt at the close of the "Antigone." Œdipus views his own deeds with the greatest horror when he learns their true nature.

The passionate reproaches which Creon and Œdipus heap upon themselves bring us to the topic of lament. While it is true that transgression is partly palliated by the laments which follow it, lamentation itself needs to be justified to the upper stratum. That justification is found in the extremity of the disaster which is the exciting cause.

Ajax's loss of honor, Philoctetes's physical anguish, Electra's grief for her father, Œdipus's discovery of his own guilt, are situations which justify the most unbridled expressions of grief and anguish. When the person's own

guilt is the occasion of his lament we have a sort of reciprocity in which guilt and lament mutually justify each other.

The disasters which tragedy depicts would be merely shocking, not tragic, if torn from their setting and narrated in the bald phrases of a newspaper item. Disaster must be exalted by receiving some spiritual significance in order to make it acceptable to the upper stratum.

Disaster most frequently appears as retribution. It is the fit punishment for transgression, and the moral sense of the spectator is satisfied. The ruin of Ajax, Œdipus and Heracles is terrible, but not wholly undeserved. Disaster also appears as due to the feebleness and mortality of man, and serves to remind us of these limitations. No human prowess is invincible; no human prosperity is secure against calamity. Such thoughts as these were prominent in the proverbial wisdom of the Greeks. Ulysses in the "Ajax" says:

"I commiserate him . . . . .  
Seeing in us all, as many as are alive,  
Nothing but phantoms or a fleeting shade."<sup>4</sup>

Man is not only morally defective but physically weak, and he is hemmed in by natural as well as moral laws. Tragedy throws upon its disasters the light of this general principle; it depicts them as inevitable, and thus leaves no room for protest.

Disaster is ennobled by the nobility with which it is borne. Such is the nobility of Œdipus, who blinds himself to shut out the sights which could only intensify his misery. Antigone faces death with the serenity of a martyr. Ajax seeks death as a release from ignominy. The aged Œdipus is vindicated and transfigured by the mysterious doom which the gods prepare for him.

Besides the factors which specifically tend to palliate

<sup>4</sup> Young's translation.

the horrors of transgression and of disaster, there are others which ennoble the tragedy as a whole. The legends on which tragedies were based had the glamor of antiquity and commanded almost religious reverence. The very place in which the tragedies were presented was sacred, and the performance was an integral part of a religious festival.

All the arts of diction and music and dancing were lavished on the presentation. The dialogue is in an exalted style, and the imagery is often beautiful.

The choral lyrics express emotions responsive to the progress of the action. But music and dancing soften the emotions they depict: they do not rack us as speech and gesture sometimes do. The choral passages serve as resting places where we relieve ourselves from tension before the inexorable course of the events again hurries us on. Scenes of tenderness have a similar function. Ajax sends for his son, prays that his lot may be more fortunate than his father's, and gives him his shield. Œdipus weeps over his helpless daughters. Deianira shows pity for Iole and the other captives. Scenes like these soften the harshness of the action in which they intervene.

Such then are the primary factors in tragedy, which appeal to the suppressed complexes, and the subsidiary factors, which disarm the hostility of the upper stratum. The structure of tragedy is like the structure of a dream, since its fundamental motives are derived from the lower stratum, and these motives are forced to express themselves in a guise acceptable to the upper stratum. The complexes which produce the dream are often survivals from the experiences of early childhood. So in the case of tragedy, the legends on which it is based have come down from the childhood of the race. And since each individual has to recapitulate the development of the race in his own

development, these ancient legends remain significant to every generation.

Tragedy may also be compared, not to the symptoms of hysteria, but to its cure. In the cathartic treatment of hysteria the purpose is to secure a vigorous emotional expression of the suppressed complex that shall drain off its energy and restore serenity to the mind as a whole. This is precisely what tragedy does for us; it furnishes an emotional outlet for our suppressed complexes. The relief which follows constitutes a sort of catharsis.

But the tragic catharsis is not merely relief; it also has a higher aspect, that of sublimation. Tragedy does not merely release the energy of the suppressed complexes, but turns it into more profitable channels. That is why tragedy gives us a sense of expansion and elevation, and makes us feel that our taste for it is not merely permissible but salutary.

Many of the devices for conciliating the upper stratum consist in appealing to some of its component complexes.

When disaster is depicted as due to moral or natural law, a strong appeal is made to our ethical and philosophical interests. It is vividly impressed upon us that man is mortal and must think thoughts that befit mortality, that revolt against the state brings disastrous results, that the violation of family ties is horrible in the extreme, that oracles are sure to be fulfilled at last, and that the gods must be revered. The drama is thus made to teach a lesson, but the lesson is effective only because the play has held the attention and stirred the imagination. When once the dramatist has us under his spell we are receptive to his message, but the spell of tragedy depends on its appeal to our suppressed complexes. It is they that furnish the energy which rivets our attention on the drama, which in turn embodies the message. A channel of discharge is thus established, leading from the suppressed complexes to those

complexes of the upper stratum which center in ethical and philosophical interests. The former are therefore made tributary to the latter. The lower complexes are relieved and the higher are strengthened and stimulated. Discord is replaced by harmony.

This happy result is not due to design. The Greek story-tellers whose imagination built up the legends of the house of Labdacus and the house of Atreus knew nothing of suppressed complexes and were not plotting to conciliate the upper stratum. But the story-teller and his auditors *had* suppressed complexes and upper strata, which guided the imagination of the story-teller and stimulated or restrained the applause of his auditors. There was a process of trial and error in which those stories were sifted out which the people best liked to hear. The dramas which grew out of these legends were developed by essentially the same process. Those plots and those methods of treatment survived which appealed to the Athenian public. Tragedy is a natural growth, not a weapon suddenly devised in the interest of some moral or philosophical propaganda. But having once arisen, it has a theoretical content and a moral effect.

The theoretical content of Sophocles's tragedies has been sufficiently indicated by previous references to his doctrines of human frailty and moral retribution. But it may be well to close with some remarks on the moral effect of tragedy. We saw that catharsis has two aspects, one of release, the other of sublimation. Since the suppressed complexes are potential disturbers of our moral peace it would seem to be a moral gain to discharge their energy into harmless channels. That is doubtless the case unless the complexes are strengthened in the process. There is sometimes an effect analogous to that which exercise has on the muscles. When a person accustomed to exercise is deprived of it for a certain length of time he becomes rest-

less; energy accumulates which demands relief through exercise. But exercise if freely pursued is likely to strengthen the muscles; if it is later discontinued the uneasiness will be all the greater. A regimen of exercise would have to be very delicately balanced in order to relieve all uneasiness without strengthening the muscles. So in the case of suppressed complexes, the processes which release their energy are likely also to enhance it. It would be very difficult to say just how often a person should visit a tragedy in order to give his complexes relief without increasing their future demands.

The situation seems more favorable when sublimation as well as release occurs. A relatively permanent connection is then established which makes the lower complexes tributary to the higher. But even in this case the lower complex may be strengthened, and sublimation is rarely so complete that the lower complex finds an outlet only through the upper one. Romantic love involves an elaborate sublimation of erotic passion, but often fails to secure entire control of its energies. So we may justly fear that the most elevating tragedies will sometimes strengthen the passions they sublimate.

Tragedy is therefore a mixed good, like nearly all the things we cherish. Its effect may sometimes tend toward morality, sometimes away from it. But fortunately its justification does not lie in its value as an instrument of moral education, but in its intrinsic value as a form of art. Morality has more potent instruments at its command, and may be trusted to take care of itself. Tragedy does enough if it lifts us for a brief time above the trivialities of life, and fills our imaginations with its glorious heroes and their mysterious fates.

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